

2017-2018 Middle School Battle of the Books Synopses

100 Days by Nicole McInnes

A teen girl suffers from progeria, a rare disease that causes her to age rapidly. This is the story of three unlikely friends learning to live life to its fullest before ultimately letting it go.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain

Whether he's sneaking doughnuts, mooning over a pretty girl, or snookering the local boys to do his work for him, Tom Sawyer is the consummate schemer—but his charm and easygoing nature keep him from being in anyone's bad graces for long. However, when Tom teams up with his friend Huck Finn, their sleepy Missouri town had better watch out.

Amina's Voice by Hena Khan

A Pakistani-American Muslim girl struggles to stay true to her family's vibrant culture while simultaneously blending in at school after tragedy strikes her community.

Beyond the Bright Sea by Lauren Wolk

Crow has lived her entire life on a tiny piece of the starkly beautiful Elizabeth Islands off the coast of Massachusetts. Her only companions are Osh, the man who rescued her from a tiny skiff as an infant and raised her, and Miss Maggie, their neighbor across the sandbar. But it isn't until the night when a mysterious fire appears across the water that an unspoken question of her own history forms in her heart and an unstoppable chain of events is triggered. Using her bravery and perseverance, Crow must follow clues that not only lead to a personal treasure, but to uncovering her lost identity and, ultimately, understanding what it means to be a family.

The Contract by Derek Jeter

In Kalamazoo, Michigan, eight-year-old Derek Jeter, who dreams of playing for the New York Yankees, learns what it takes to be a champion on and off the field.

Ghost by Jason Reynolds

Ghost, a naturally talented runner and troublemaker, is recruited for an elite middle school track team. He must stay on track, literally and figuratively, to reach his full potential.

The Girl from Everywhere by Heidi Heilig

Sixteen-year-old Nix has sailed across the globe and through centuries aboard her time-traveling father's ship. But when he gambles with her very existence, it all may come to an end.

Goodbye Stranger by Rebecca Stead

As Bridge makes her way through seventh grade on Manhattan's Upper West Side with her best friends, curvaceous Em, crusader Tab, and a curious new friend, she finds the answers she has been seeking.

The Haunting of Falcon House by Eugene Yelchin

A long undisturbed bedroom. A startling likeness. A mysterious friend. When twelve-year-old Prince Lev Lvov goes to live with his aunt at Falcon House, he takes his rightful place as heir to the Lvov family estate. Prince Lev dreams of becoming a hero of Russia like his great ancestors. But he'll discover that dark secrets haunt this house. Prince Lev is the only one who can set them free—will he be the hero his family needs?

Hello, Universe by Erin Entrada Kelly

A funny and poignant neighborhood story about unexpected friendships. Told from four intertwining points of view—two boys and two girls—the novel celebrates bravery, being different, and finding your inner *bayani* (hero).

Hidden Figures: Young Reader's Edition by Margot Lee Shetterly

This is the powerful story of four African-American female mathematicians at NASA who helped achieve some of the greatest moments in our space program.

Isabel Feeney: Star Reporter by Beth Fantaskey

It's 1920s Chicago—the guns-and-gangster era of Al Capone—and it's unusual for a girl to be selling the *Tribune* on the street corner. But ten-year-old Isabel Feeney is unusual . . . unusually obsessed with being a news reporter. She can't believe her luck when she stumbles into a real-life murder scene *and* her hero, the famous journalist Maude Collier. The story of how Isabel fights to defend the honor of her accused friend and latches on to the murder case makes for a winning middle grade mystery.

The Island of the Unknowns by Benedict Carey

When people start vanishing from a godforsaken trailer park next to the Folsom Energy Plant, two eleven-year-olds investigate using mathematical clues that were hastily planted by their friend Mrs. Clarke before she disappeared

Kick by Walter Dean Myers and Ross Workman

Kevin Johnson is a great kid and skilled soccer player. With attitude. Then he ends up in jail. Sergeant Brown is a tough cop and Kevin's mentor. With attitude. If Kevin and Brown can learn to trust each other, they might be able to turn things around. Before it's too late.

Lost Boy by Tim Green

After a near-fatal car accident, twelve-year-old Ryder's mother needs an operation they cannot afford and while a new friend tries to raise funds, Ryder travels with a grouchy, disabled neighbor, from Yankee Stadium to Turner Field seeking the major league baseball player who might be Ryder's father.

The Machine Stops by E.M. Forster

The Machine Stops is a chilling, short story masterpiece about the role of technology in our lives. Written in 1909, it's as relevant today as the day it was published. Forster has several prescient notions including instant messages (email!) and cinematophoes (machines that project visual images).

Nine Ten: A September 11 Story by Nora Reilly Baskin

Ask anyone: September 11, 2001, was serene and lovely, a perfect day—until a plane struck the World Trade Center. But right now it is a few days earlier, and four kids in different parts of the country are going about their lives. These four don't know one another, but their lives are about to intersect in ways they never could have imagined.

Of Beetles and Angels by Mawi Asgedom

Following his father's advice to "treat all people—even the most unsightly beetles—as though they were angels sent from heaven," Mawi overcomes the challenges of language barriers, cultural differences, racial prejudice, and financial disadvantage to build a fulfilling, successful life for himself in his new home.

Orphan Island by Lauren Snyder

On the island, everything is perfect. The sun rises in a sky filled with dancing shapes; the wind, water, and trees shelter and protect those who live there; when the nine children go to sleep in their cabins, it is with full stomachs and joy in their hearts. And only one thing ever changes: on that day, each year, when a boat appears from the mist upon the ocean carrying one young child to join them—and taking the eldest one away, never to be seen again.

Passenger by Alexandra Bracken

Nicholas Carter is content with his life at sea, free from the Ironwoods—a powerful family in the Colonies—and the servitude he's known at their hands. But with the arrival of an unusual passenger on his ship comes the insistent pull of the past that he can't escape and the family that won't let him go so easily. Now the Ironwoods are searching for a stolen object of untold value, one they believe only Etta, his passenger, can find. In order to protect her, Nick must ensure she brings it back to them—whether she wants to or not.

The Playbook by Kwame Alexander

You gotta know the rules to play the game. *Ball is life*. Take it to the hoop. Soar. What can we imagine for our lives? What if we were the star players, moving and grooving through the game of life? What if we had our own rules of the game to help us get what we want, what we aspire to, what will enrich our lives?

Posted by John David Anderson

In middle school, words aren't just words. They can be weapons. They can be gifts. The right words can win you friends or make you enemies. They can come back to haunt you. Sometimes they can change things forever.

Projekt 1065 by Alan Gratz

Infiltrate. Befriend. Sabotage. World War II is raging. Michael O'Shaunessey, originally from Ireland, now lives in Nazi Germany with his parents. Like the other boys in his school, Michael is a member of the Hitler Youth. But Michael has a secret. He and his parents are spies. Michael despises everything the Nazis stand for. But he joins in the Hitler Youth's horrific games and book burnings, playing the part so he can gain insider knowledge. When Michael learns about Projekt 1065, a secret Nazi war mission, things get even more complicated. He must prove his loyalty to the Hitler Youth at all costs -- even if it means risking everything he cares about. Including... his own life.

School of the Dead by Avi

When Uncle Charlie dies suddenly, Tony is devastated. Then he starts seeing Uncle Charlie *everywhere*! It doesn't help that Tony switched schools—it was Uncle Charlie's dying wish that Tony attend the Penda School, where Uncle Charlie himself went as a kid. The Penda School is eerie enough without his uncle's ghost making it worse. On top of that, rumors have been circulating about a student who went missing shortly before Tony arrived. Could that somehow be related to Uncle Charlie's ghost?

Scythe by Neal Shusterman

A world with no hunger, no disease, no war, no misery: humanity has conquered all those things, and has even conquered death. Now Scythes are the only ones who can end life—and they are commanded to do so, in order to keep the size of the population under control. Citra and Rowan are chosen to apprentice to a scythe—a role that neither wants. These teens must master the “art” of taking life, knowing that the consequence of failure could mean losing their own.

See You in the Cosmos by Jack Cheng

11-year-old Alex Petroski loves space and rockets, his mom, his brother, and his dog Carl Sagan—named for his hero, the real-life astronomer. All he wants is to launch his golden iPod into space the way Carl Sagan (the man, not the dog) launched his Golden Record on the Voyager spacecraft in 1977. From Colorado to New Mexico, Las Vegas to L.A., Alex records a journey on his iPod to show other lifeforms what life on earth, *his* earth, is like. But his destination keeps changing. And the funny, lost, remarkable people he meets along the way can only partially prepare him for the secrets he'll uncover—from the truth about his long-dead dad to the fact that, for a kid with a troubled mom and a mostly not-around brother, he has way more family than he ever knew.

Smiles to Go by Jerry Spinelli

Ninth grader Will Tuppence is in control. He plans everything obsessively, from the perfect stargazing night with his crush, Mi-Su, to the regular Saturday-night games of Monopoly with his friends. He's even planned his entire adulthood: career as an astronomer; mint condition, black 1985 Jaguar XJS/12; two kids. . . But everything changes the day Will learns one startling fact: protons—those tiny atomic particles, the building blocks to the building blocks of life—can die. The one thing that was so certain in this world to Will has an expiration date. And Will's carefully planned-out life? Not so certain, either.

Solo by Kwame Alexander and Mary Rand Hesse

Seventeen-year-old Blade Morrison knows the life of a rock star isn't really about the glitz and glamour. All the new cars and money in the world can't make up for the scathing tabloid covers or the fact that his father is struggling with just about every addiction under the sun. Haunted by memories of his mother—who died when Blade was nine—and the ruin his father's washed-up legacy and life have brought to the family, Blade is left to figure out life on his own. But, he's not all alone: He's got the friendship of a jazz-musician mentor, Robert; the secret love of a girlfriend, Chapel; and his music. Things are looking up for Blade, until he discovers a deeply protected family secret—one that further threatens his relationship with his family and has him questioning his own identity.

Summer at Forsaken Lake by Michael D. Beil

With their father enroute to Africa for Doctors Without Borders, city-kids Nicholas and younger twin sisters Haley and Hetty are off to spend the summer with their Great-Uncle Nick at his house on Forsaken Lake. Despite some initial doubts, Nicholas is right at home in the country and makes fast friends with a local-girl, the tomboy Charlie. The summer takes a turn toward the mysterious, though, when Nicholas discovers an old movie that his father made as a boy: it tells the story of the local legend, The Seaweed Strangler, but was never finished. Before long Nicholas wants answers both about the legend, and about the movie. Together, he and Charlie work to uncover the truth and discover some long-buried family secrets along the way.

Test by William Sleator

In the security-obsessed, elitist United States of the near future, where a standardized test determines each person's entire future, a powerful man runs a corrupt empire until seventeen-year-old Ann and other students take the lead in boycotting the test.

Theodore Boone: The Scandal by John Grisham

When an anonymous tip leads the school board to investigate a suspicious increase in scores at another local middle school, Theo finds himself thrust in the middle of a cheating scandal. With insider knowledge and his future on the line, Theo must follow his keen instincts to do what's right in the newest case for clever kid lawyer Theo Boone.

This Dark Endeavor: The Apprenticeship of Victor Frankenstein by Kenneth Oppel

Victor and Konrad are the twin brothers Frankenstein. They are nearly inseparable. When Konrad falls gravely ill, Victor is not satisfied with the various doctors his parents have called in to help. He is drawn to The Dark Library where he uncovers an ancient formula for the Elixir of Life. Elizabeth, Henry, and Victor immediately set out to create the formula. Determination and the unthinkable outcome of losing his brother spur Victor on in the quest for the three ingredients that will save Konrad's life.

Undeclared: Jim Thorpe and the Carlisle Indian School Football Team by Steve Sheinkin

This is an unflinching look at the U.S. government's violent persecution of Native Americans and the school that was designed to erase Indian cultures. Expertly told by three-time National Book Award finalist Steve Sheinkin, it's the story of a group of young men who came together at that school, the overwhelming obstacles they faced both on and off the field, and their absolute refusal to accept defeat.

Under their Skin by Margaret Peterson Haddix

Nick and Eryn's mom is getting remarried, and the twelve-year-old twins are skeptical when she tells them their lives won't change much. Well, yes, they will have to move. And they will have a new stepfather, stepbrother, and stepsister. But Mom tells them not to worry. They won't ever have to meet their stepsiblings. This news puzzles Nick and Eryn, so the twins set out on a mission to find out who these kids are—and why they're being kept hidden.

Undertow by Michael Buckley

Sixteen-year-old Lyric Walker's life is forever changed when she witnesses the arrival of 30,000 Alpha, a five-nation race of ocean-dwelling warriors, on her beach in Coney Island. The world's initial wonder and awe over the Alpha quickly turns ugly and paranoid and violent, and Lyric's small town transforms into a military zone with humans on one side and Alpha on the other. Only, what if the Alpha are not actually the enemy? What if they are in fact humanity's best chance for survival? Because the real enemy is coming. And it's more terrifying than anything the world has ever seen.

The Warden's Daughter by Jerry Spinelli

A teenage girl who lives with her father, a prison warden, looks to inmates for a mother figure, only to find herself in the process.

Wolf Hollow by Lauren Wolk

Twelve-year-old Annabelle must learn to stand up for what's right in the face of a manipulative and violent new bully who targets people Annabelle cares about, including a homeless World War I veteran.

Word Nerd by Susin Neilsen

Twelve-year-old Ambrose, forced into home schooling after a brutal attack by bullies at his new school strikes up a friendship with Cosmo, the son of his landlord, and convinces Cosmo to take him to a local, Scrabble club meeting while his mother is at work.

The Worst Night Ever by Dave Barry

Wyatt Palmer is just another undersized freshman hoping to fit in at high school, but when his best friend Matt Diaz's pet ferret ends up in the hands of the Bevin family, the most popular boys at Coral Cove High, Wyatt and Matt try to get the animal back by attending a party for the cool clique and stumble onto the Bevin family's dark secret.

Yours Truly: A Pumpkin Falls Mystery by Heather Vogel Frederick

When someone tries to sabotage the maple trees on her friend Franklin's family farm, Truly Lovejoy rallies the Pumpkin Falls Private Eyes to investigate